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Laird Eyes Civilian for Intelligence

By Michael Getler
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The White House is expected to approve soon a Pentagon plan which would install, for the first time, a civilian as the top-ranking intelligence official in the Defense Department, according to informed government sources.

The move is part of a more extensive, government-wide reorganization plan, much of which is still unsettled, aimed at making the gathering of all types of military and foreign intelligence more efficient and far less expensive.

Estimates of the current government-wide cost each year for global intelligence gathering, sorting and analyzing run to about \$5 billion and involve some 200,000 people.

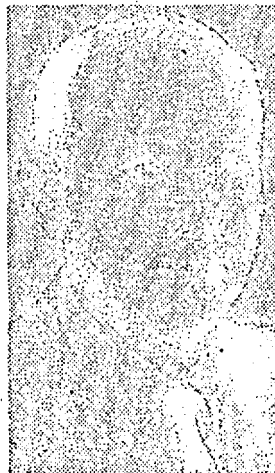
The bulk of the money—an estimated \$3 billion annually—and the people—about 150,000—are associated with the Defense Department.

The Pentagon part of the planned reorganization involves establishment of a new Assistant Secretary of Defense for Intelligence whose job would be to oversee the entire military network, including the separate activities of all three services plus those of the Defense Intelligence Agency, which is headed by a military man, and the code-cracking National Security Agency.

There are several candidates for the new post. But the man most Pentagon insiders expect to get the job is Dr. Albert C. Hall, currently a vice-president of Martin-Marietta Corp., the company that builds the booster rockets for most of the U.S. spy satellites.

Hall has a reputation as a top-notch engineer and space expert, having been one of the leading space planners in the

The new assistant secretary will become the ranking intelligence official in the Pentagon and Defense Secretary Laird's chief intelligence advisor. As Defense officials describe the plan, however, the



1960 AP Picture

ALBERT C. HALL

... may join Pentagon director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, Lt. Gen. Donald V. Bennett, will also retain direct access to Laird.

The Pentagon has never had a civilian in the top intelligence job before, on a full-time basis. (Last year, after the department was rocked by disclosures of military spying on civilians, Laird named his close friend and then Assistant Secretary of Defense for Administration, Robert F. Froehke, to also serve as a special assistant for intelligence).

Behind the new move, as Pentagon officials explain it, is a need to cut down the enormous size of the military intelligence community and to weed out unnecessary projects and facilities.

The feeling that the military intelligence apparatus had grown too large and costly in comparison to the amount of useful information it was producing was the principal impetus, according to civilian officials, for a White House-ordered study of all intelligence operations earlier this year.

In addition, some sources say that President Nixon, while impressed in large measure with the work of the civilian-run Central Intelligence Agency, was unhappy with

Also, the President reportedly was annoyed with the lag in U.S. knowledge of a Soviet cease-fire violation involving construction of SAM missile sites near the Suez Canal during the summer of 1970.

Demands for more efficiency have also come recently from Sen. Allen J. Boller (D-La.), chairman of the powerful Senate Appropriations Committee. Boller is threatening to cut \$500 million out of the total intelligence budget which might involve eliminating some 50,000 jobs.

Some government officials estimate that actual cuts could run to about 20,000 people and a savings of a few hundred million dollars.

While the Pentagon, as the chief target of the efficiency experts, is about to get some help, proposals for reorganizing the rest of the intelligence community appear to be still involved in bureaucratic infighting.

Plans to create a new super-agency with CIA director Richard Helms as the chief have been dropped, though many officials believe that Helms will eventually emerge with strengthened and broader powers over all intelligence operations and resources.

Plans to put a new intelligence coordinator in the White House are also said to be unsettled, though such a prospect is viewed as likely.

Helms appears to be a central figure in the question of how far the government will go to shake-up the entire intelligence community. While Helms is viewed in all quarters as the top professional in the field, some intelligence experts fear that giving him a job with a bigger administrative work load will dilute his contribution to the overall quality of U.S. intelligence, weaken the tightly knit CIA, and focus even more power in the White House.